THE RICE MEMORIAL CHAPEL*

THIS is a very significant day in the history of the Rice Institute. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. J. Newton Rayzor, who have brought to realization the hope of many years that Rice should have a chapel as a center of our religious interests and activities. Now that we have met here to dedicate our Chapel, it is important for us to consider what we are dedicating and the purpose to which we are dedicating it. Why should Rice have a chapel at all: why should religion have a recognized place in the life and program of our university, and what is this place and role of religion? I am not talking to you here on the spur of the moment. Day after day, as I have watched this beautiful building rise on our campus, I have been thinking about it, and now I give you simply my candid personal opinion.

Henry Thoreau said that in every temple there should be a statue to the Goddess of Sincerity. And I feel that sincerity is our chief duty on this occasion. Shall I spend this half hour in reciting soft words about God and religious faith? God is in no need of compliments from me. But you and I do have a need, the need of recognizing clearly and candidly the critical state of thought to which modern education has brought many minds in their views about religion. What is the reason for this tension between higher education and religious faith? This is a very serious problem in our spiritual life; we cannot brush it aside. It is imposed on our reflection at this hour of dedicating our university chapel. In

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a forthright spirit we should inquire what it is that the university and the church, critical thinking and religious conviction, have to say to each other. A better mutual understanding of these two is important, for the church needs the cooperation of thinking minds, and surely thinking men need the highest values of life which are to be found in religious experience.

Let us consider briefly the part which religion and theology have played in the historical development of universities in our Western civilization.

The medieval schools and universities were established and directed by the church. The center and summit of their educational programs were theological. Their doctors were doctors of the church, and the greatest of them were canonized saints, like St. Bonaventura, the Seraphic Doctor, or the most eminent, St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor. This concentration on religion and theology which marked medieval Catholic education persisted for some time also under Protestant authority. At Calvin's University of Geneva a student had to inscribe himself a Calvinist before he could be admitted to the lectures. And at Harvard in its early days the President and Faculty admonished the student to "consider well the main end of his life and studies, . . . to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life."

This educational dominance of theology is not altogether extinct in our time. It still survives in some sectarian institutions. But the whole spirit of the great modern universities proceeds in a different direction. I do not know of any seraphic or angelic doctors in our college faculties. Our programs of higher education are explicitly ordered under the heads of the sciences and the humanities. This radical shift of emphasis has marked the intellectual history of our Western world since the Renaissance. Both the content and the

criteria of modern thinking have differed radically from those of medieval minds. Instead of meditating on theology and supernaturalism, men turned to the investigation of nature and human nature. The modern mind became secular in its range of interests. And it has been secular also in its methods and in its tests of knowledge. Men no longer submitted to dogmatic authority but undertook to find the facts by direct inquiry, to organize their ideas by logical methods, and to submit them continually to experimental control and rational criticism. The Scholastics adopted as their first principles the dogmas of the church, and then by analysis and deduction reasoned out an orthodox system of conclusions. But modern minds, scientific and humanistic, have sought by the study of the facts undogmatic knowledge of the world about us and of ourselves in this world. Modern thinking has gained in mastery by adopting specialized methods of inquiry in the various sciences. The secular mind has matched theoretical mastery with practical skill: so the pure and the applied sciences have expanded beyond belief both our knowledge of the laws of nature and our use of its vast resources.

What I have recited here are the plain historical facts; but what interests us in our problem is to consider the bearing of these facts on religion. The medieval doctors of the church did have a place for science and philosophy. They called them servants of theology. The Scholastic teachers meant to say that science and philosophy should serve and submit to final theological authority. This sort of subservience the modern mind has rejected conclusively. But there *is* a great service which modern science and critical history and philosophy have indeed rendered to religion. They have exposed the untenable character of many traditional religious beliefs, and so they have compelled some religious minds to reconsider their basic principles and the true character of religion.

It is very important that we should be clear about this great service of modern criticism to religion. Any intelligent and fair-minded student of the history of ideas knows that the progress of truth in every field has been marked by the continual exposure of traditional errors. The history of science is a record of this progressive self-revision and self-correction. All the religions of the past, including the Christian, have expressed in many ways the thinking of men whose knowledge of nature and of history was defective. And there is nothing discreditable in men's early beliefs in untenable ideas. What is lamentable is many men's continued advocacy of errors after they have been proved to be wrong and untenable.

To recognize without any evasion these exposures of errors in our religious traditions is essential, if religion is to retain, or better, to regain the confidence of enlightened thinking minds. Let us remember that the Chapel which we are dedicating today is a university chapel. If it is to serve the spiritual needs of our Rice community, faculty and students alike, it must express a spirit in religion which does not ignore the problems of critical thinking. You cannot brush aside here the exposure of superstitions, lest some young minds reach the disastrous conclusion that religion is nothing but sham and superstition—and that would be spiritual ruin. A general charge of erroneous beliefs may sound offensive, yet even a brief statement of some modern facts and conclusions should suffice to convince us that the main criticism is sound. The plain fact is that in one field of inquiry after another, whenever modern minds have investigated nature or explored history with pure respect for the truth, they have been led to conclusions contrary to many established religious beliefs. Against the parochial doctrine of an earth-centered universe is the boundless universe disclosed by the telescopes of mod-

ern astronomy, of innumerable stars and solar systems, in which our earth is but a speck within a speck. The time outlook of church tradition was just as meager as its spatial range. The old Biblical scholarship of Archbishop Ussher dated the creation of the world at 4004 B.C. But historical research has recorded established civilizations of greater antiquity, and the Archbishop's 4004 years would have to be multiplied not a thousand but who knows how many million times before they could reach the origin of the universe: that is, if there could be any sense at all in the idea of the origin of the universe. Modern biological research has discredited the old Hebrew tales about the creation of plants, animals, and man and woman. Modern literary-historical studies of both the Old and the New Testament writings have shown the need of thoroughgoing revision of our traditional views about the Bible. Every one of these statements can be elaborated and documented. But again we ask: What bearing do these conclusions of modern scientific and historical research have on our understanding and evaluation of religion?

In trying to answer this question we require a spirit of integrity in our devotion to the truth, wherever the truth may point. This spiritual integrity is itself a condition of our realization of the highest values, including the values of a mature religion. The single-minded pursuit and possession of the truth, as it emancipates us from the bonds of errors and superstitions, where religion has been weak and unsound, should enable us to recognize the real spiritual foundations of religion, where it has been and still is strong and true and abiding. This is the mark of spiritual integrity and spiritual growth. St. Paul expressed it truly: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, I reasoned as a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways."

This, then, first of all: seek the truth and hold fast to the

truth. The words of St. John inscribed on the Main Building of the University of Texas should be the motto of every educator: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." And they should be the motto of our religious quest, for as the great Jewish philosopher Spinoza put it in a word, "God *is* Truth." Twelve and a half centuries before Spinoza, St. Augustine expressed it even more eloquently: "Let every good and true Christian understand that truth, wherever he finds it, belongs to his Lord." To which we may add that any error anywhere cannot be of the Lord and must be abandoned by good religion. We cannot establish sound religion upon unsound and mistaken ideas. It is misdirected piety to claim Divine authority for our continued beliefs in fallacies. The words of Job to his bigoted friends should be a warning to us all: "Will you speak falsely for God, and speak deceitfully for him? . . . Can you deceive him as one deceives a man?" Galileo was right in his answer to the Inquisition when he was accused of teaching doctrines contrary to God's truth. He said that the only way he had of being sure that his ideas were not contrary to God's truth was to make them as true as possible. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

But at this point the religious traditionalist may raise an objection: Are there not errors also in your sciences, in your histories, and in your philosophies? This is certainly the case, and good science and good philosophy must be the first to acknowledge and abandon errors as soon as they are exposed. The astronomy of Aristotle and Ptolemy is like the biology of the Book of Genesis: erroneous. A good Aristotelian should not waste his time in defending Aristotle's errors, but now, should he dismiss also the great truths in the Aristotelian philosophy? By no means: we reject errors, but we remain loyal to the truths. Even so in our use of the Bible

and in our understanding and evaluation of religion. Again St. Paul teaches us here: "Prove all things, hold fast to what is true."

Right here we may see the crucial confusion in which the very advance of the modern sciences has embroiled many minds. It is the confusion of thinking that science has not only exposed certain errors in traditional religion but has not replaced religion altogether, that physical science provides the one and only account of reality and human life. This proposal to use physical science as an all-comprehending philosophy of life is as mistaken in its way as the traditional proposal of theology to dictate the course and conclusions of scientific research. It is the replacement of one dogmatism by another. There is more to the world and to man than the mechanism which the physical scientist is so competent in exploring and exploiting. For there is man's spiritual activity, his creative genius in all the arts, his pursuit and achievement of moral values, his self-dedication to standards and ideals. Let us keep in mind the great words of the ancient philosopher Plotinus engraved on one of the tablets of our Lovett Hall: "Love, beauty, joy, and worship are forever building, unbuilding, and rebuilding in every man's soul."

The scientific activity itself disproves any exclusively mechanistic doctrine. Physical science deals with physical things and processes, but science itself is not a physical process; it is an intellectual, logical activity. The truths of quantum mechanics do not imply that the quantum theory itself is merely a quantum process. Scientific thought is an outstanding evidence of the reality of rational power in the world. Even more: there is scarcely any class in our society which exemplifies more truly the spirit of integrity in the pursuit of truth than the class of pure scientists. So when some of them venture to express their philosophy of life, they

should not—shall I put it in this way?—they should not forget themselves and speak as if what their telescopes and microscopes and radiation screens disclose is more real than their minds which devise and interpret it all.

Surely you can recognize in what I have been saying our deep personal quandary, the perplexity in which so many of us find ourselves in our deepest thought and feeling. On the one hand, much of our structure of religious beliefs has been disrupted by modern research, and we are disturbed about the rest of it. Nor can we wish it otherwise, for after all, truth is truth and error is error. Precisely in religion, our most important concern, it is imperative that we face reality as it is. We should remember the warning of the poet Arthur Clough:

> But play no tricks upon thyself, O man;
> Let fact be fact, and life the thing it can.

This is one side of our problem, and regarding it I see no way of evasion. But there is another side. The scientific and humanistic accounts of our world and ourselves in it, correctly described and explained though they are in so many ways, yet impress us in final judgment as insufficient. Something is lacking in them all, and that the most important. We have reliable knowledge of so many matters, but the great saving word of wisdom which we need above all—how and where are we to find it? Is not this the spiritual problem of our age, so learned in its various ways, and yet so perplexed and dismayed in the very heart of its needs and hopes?

Here, then, as I see it, is the true place of this Chapel in the life and thought of our university. Alongside of the classrooms, libraries, and laboratories of secular scholarship and research, this Chapel should provide the living expression of men's agelong quest of the center and summit of spiritual values. My little talk today is not a sermon, but it does have a text. My text is in the words addressed by St. Paul to the

Athenians: all people "seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us." Men's religious search for the divine realities is universal. No age, no special tradition has the exclusive possession of the truth or of spiritual insight. Our Chapel at Rice should not be a sectarian institution of any sort. No special creed, no rigid ritual, no isolation should have any place here. In this Chapel every seeker after the Divine should feel at home.

As we sit together here, note some interesting aspects of what is around us. This Chapel on our Rice Campus is next door to our rooms of social contacts and friendships. Religion is not apart from life; it is not alien to our plain human interests. Warp and woof, true religion is of the texture of daily human living. Was not this characteristic of the Protestant Reformation, that it sought to span the traditional gulf between laymen and clergy, between secularism and spirituality? This is life-pervading religion, in which men and women work, play, plan, build, study, trade, and in all their various walks of life, in joy and in sorrow, minister to each other in love and good faith. So the religious values are not above or apart from actual human life. As Jesus put it, "the Kingdom of God is within you."

Thus religion is bound to engage, not only our feelings and our practice, but also the principles and problems of our thought, our critical intelligence. It is also bound to affect and refine our taste. Across the road from our Chapel, in one direction, is the Fondren Library, treasure-house of the knowledge and the thought of men through the ages; in another direction are laboratories of science, workrooms of ever ongoing research and discovery of new knowledge. Beside them are halls devoted to humanistic studies, to history, literature, philosophy, and to the expression and enjoyment of

the arts. We should keep in mind this correlation of our various higher interests: social, intellectual, artistic, religious. We may go our various ways in our daily concerns and specialties. But again and again our spirits are quickened, they come alive to the conviction of a supreme all-pervading spiritual reality which gives meaning and value to our lives, in which we really "live and move and have our being." It baffles all our endeavors to reduce this conviction to any definite formula. Its truth is as the truth of the greatest poetry. Wordsworth spoke for us all as he looked on Tintern Abbey:

> . . . And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. . . .

Nothing is a surer index of a man's spiritual stature than his conception of the Divine. The idea of God has been men's expression of the supreme, their gesture towards the boundless utmost of perfection. Our strength may fail: face to face with nature we may seem less than nothing. Our survey of the immense universe may show us to be insignificant specks, and our careers but ripples of a moment on the ocean of eternity. For science has disclosed to us a world in which natural forces operate without any apparent gleam of intelligence. Against this impassive universe, what are we and our hopes and ideals? The evils that beset and destroy us may not even be due to any malignity anywhere. Nature is neutral; it goes on its way unmoved.

But matter and bulk, we protest, cannot exhaust nature.

For we are in and of nature, and no account of us in terms of mere matter and bulk can comprehend us. If the universe may in one perspective be conceived as astronomer and atom-crusher conceive it, in another perspective it is revealed in our spiritual experience. Else how could we understand and explain scientific experience itself, with its logic and its problems, or conscience, or piety, the tragedy of man's religious perplexities? So our searching and aspiring spirit need not be cast down. This conviction that spiritual values are real and abiding is the heart of religious faith.

I find something profoundly significant in the circular approach to this raised round pillar, without any exclusive symbolism of any sort. This need not signify a nondescript togetherness of loose ideas, without any characteristic expression of religious convictions. Not at all. Every man's religious quest is bound to be in some ways unique, but it can also share its character of integrity and devotion with those of different beliefs and ideals. Each one of us is moving toward the Divine center along his own particular radius, whether it be Baptist or Episcopalian or Unitarian or Humanist or whatever, Protestant or Catholic, Christian or Jewish or Mohammedan or Buddhist. Along the periphery, on the outer circumference of sectarian adherence, our differences from each other are more conspicuous. But as we move towards the center, we may draw nearer and come to some closer understanding. Most of us who will come here for meditation and worship are and will be children of our Christian heritage, and to us the Christian gospel has an intimate appeal which no other religion can provide. But we can deepen our Christian insight and our devotion to the Christian truths as we come to understand the truths and the principles of other religions. Remember the words of our Lord: "In my Father's house are many rooms." We need

wider spiritual contacts. Read the Scriptures of other faiths, and then return to the Sermon on the Mount, and you will gain an intensified realization of the Christian heart of religious insight. The supreme truths carry their own conviction. What is important in the religious life is not dogmatic rigid authority but spiritual vitality. This was the heart of Jesus's appeal of a living and growing Gospel: "My Father is working still, and I work."

May this spirit of sympathetic understanding of our common spiritual quest and pursuit of the truth, may it mark this Chapel, so that it may become not a divisive but an integrating agency in our religious life, not an institution of sectarian propaganda but of tolerance and willingness to learn from each other, this spirit which is such a crucial need of us all in these days of world-wide misunderstandings and conflicts!

For religion is not only a quest; it is also a conviction: religion is our conviction of the supreme reality of the highest values. To the growing realization of these highest divine values may this Rice Chapel be ever dedicated!

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